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COLONEL CHAU ON PACIFICATION AND POLITICS
IN SOUTH VIETNAM

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PREFACE

The following pages offer the comments of Lieutenant Colonel Tran Ngoc Chau on a variety of "Vietnam topics" with emphasis on pacification experiences and politics within the government of South Vietnam. I have dictated these comments on the basis of notes taken during two day-long seminars which Colonel Chau held with RAND personnel in February 1968. I have paraphrased Colonel Chau's remarks in the first person though the words in quotation marks or indented are verbatim quotations. To be sure, there probably has been a slight bit of unconscious "style" editing throughout.

I thought Colonel Chau's comments might be worth recording and distributed to a broad audience within RAND for two reasons. First, because of the speaker himself who was introduced to us in Dan Ellsberg's memo of February 8 as follows:

Lt. Col. Tran Ngoc Chau, now on indefinite leave from the Vietnamese Army as a member of the lower house, the National Assembly, Saigon, is visiting RAND as a guest of Daniel Ellsberg.

Chau is probably the leading Vietnamese expert on the pacification process. As province chief of Kien Hoa, he initiated the successful Census Grievance Process, later extended throughout the country, and was an early experimenter with pacification cadre teams. In 1966 he was made the

first head of the Revolutionary Development Cadre Program. He has written a book on pacification, now being translated by USAID. In the recent elections for the National Assembly, Chau was elected with 45 percent of the vote in Kien Hoa against a field of nineteen candidates: the largest plurality in Vietnam (the runner-up for the second seat got 19 percent). Until 1950, Chau fought in the Viet Minh against the French serving as Battalion Commander and Brigadier Political Officer.

I felt that simply because of Chau's long, intense, and varied involvement in Vietnam's contemporary history, his perceptions and prescriptions would be of intrinsic analytical interest.

Secondly, these notes emphasize Chau's thoughts on two topics which have not been much addressed within The RAND Corporation -- the learning experiences that have accompanied pacification efforts; and, the political aspects of the functioning of ARVN and other parts of the Government of Vietnam.

In the course of these seminars I was stimulated to write a number of thoughts and reactions to comments being made and I dictated these concurrently with my presentation of the seminar proceedings. I have decided to include some of these thoughts and reactions in a separate part of this D for whatever interest these may have to other Vietnam research personnel. Though not

polished analyses, these personal comments are intended to make some contribution at least in the area of defining issues for discussion and research.

A detailed table of contents has been provided to help the reader locate particular subject matter of interest to him. Also, I have tried to indicate the relationship between my own comments appearing in the second section and the seminar's material by page cross-referencing in the draft and also within the table of contents.

The interested reader who lacks the time to peruse this lengthy record should consult Bill Stewart's excellent and concise summary of the discussions, titled, Tran Ngoc Chau on Pacification (D(L) 16699-ARPA, February 13, 1968).

My apologies in advance if I have misquoted, or misinterpreted any remarks of Colonel Chau or RAND personnel.

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PART I COLONEL CHAU'S REMARKS

Personal background

In addition to the positions that Dan Ellsberg has mentioned, I want to say a few more things about my background. I was from a very conservative religious family in the Imperial City of Hue. As a young Boy Scout in 1942 I was recruited into the Vietminh by a very outstanding leader of the International Boy Scout movement named Professor Bo. Beginning in 1942 Professor Bo organized clandestine Communist units among selected Vietnamese youth. In 1944 hand-picked youths from each province were sent to a special course in North Vietnam called The First Political Military Course. This course lasted three months and at its conclusion I was made one of the first platoon leaders in the Vietminh Liberation Army which, in 1947, was renamed the Army for the Protection of the Country. In 1945 to 1950 I served at various levels in the Liberation Army and moved up to the level of Political Commissar for the 5th Vietminh Inter-zone, which consisted of the areas from Duong Nang to the 3rd Corp in South Vietnam.

I left the Vietminh for several reasons. My conservative background made me very attached to the Royal Family and when Bao Dai returned to Vietnam, we felt we

had a national patriot. Besides that, the Vietminh increasingly began to discriminate against all elements they considered unreliable, such as "bourgeoise," Catholics and the like. A number of persons from religious backgrounds like myself left the Vietminh at that time. This was one of the major mistakes of the Vietminh -- that they were unwilling to trust the inside cadre only on the basis of social origin. Another mistake was the 1946 assassination of all non-communist elements within the Nationalist movement.

First attempts at pacification

The first use of the term pacification was in 1952 when the French attempted three types of programs to clear the Vietminh from the countryside. One was in the Delta region of North Vietnam, a predominately Catholic area; the second type of French program occurred in the central coastal area, provinces such as Binh Dinh. The third took place in the Mekong Delta area. Each program was different and yet there were similar aspects: first, the launching of a military operation to clear Vietminh units from the area; secondly, the improvement and expansion of a French-type police system; thirdly, the reorganization of a village committee to take direct

of the villages before undertaking pacification activities. There were not enough economic development activities and, thirdly, the province officials, in their haste, were not willing to persuade people to undertake the actions the government desired, but instead forced them to do various things, such as the construction of combat hamlets and the like.

During this time I was one of the province chiefs who refused to make haste merely for the sake of appearing successful to my superiors. My province, Kien Hoa at that time, also continually appeared as 36th or 37th among the provinces in the monthly progress reports that we had to file. Nevertheless, I believe the 1961 pacification program would have been a success "had it not been for the 1963 Buddhist crisis." This crisis undermined the government at the center and made any progress in the field impossible.

In the aftermath of the November 1963 coup against Diem, the military regime declared there would be no more strategic hamlet programs and disbanded the combat youth that the Nhus had set up. Nevertheless within a short time the value of the program was seen and under a new name a new pacification effort was begun.

The 1963 Pacification program

In setting up the new pacification program under the military regime, a major obstacle to be overcome was the fact that "many of those participating in the former pacification program had been physically or psychologically condemned." They were looked upon as "Nhu people," and felt defensive. The military said that they had collaborated with the Nhucs, that they had cooperated with the Diem government and, therefore, were not reliable; yet these people such as myself and many others were the ones who had experience in pacification. Due to this psychological defensiveness, a number of the people who "joined the new pacification program did so without enthusiasm."

Current pacification program -- December 1965 to present *

In discussing the current pacification program I must refer to my participation and my ideas. I do this without any sense of pride and Dan Ellsberg can verify the facts that I shall relate.

General Thang became Minister of Rural Development in December 1965 and this marked the beginning of the present pacification program. He appointed me as First Director of the Cadre Training Program because, as province chief in Kien Hoa, I had begun to work on pacification in my own way with some genuine success.

* Comment: see pp. 40-45.

The ideas that I initiated in the first part of 1964 and found extremely useful was the census grievance program, and I shall now describe it and my reasons for initiating it.

I realized that the most important reasons for lack of success in pacification was because of the non-participation of people. This non-participation was not because the people supported the Viet Cong, because if the people had supported the Viet Cong, I would not have had the courage to continue in my activities at all. Rather they were threatened by the Viet Cong in a kind of imminent way. The Viet Cong were not there in the villages I dealt with; they were relatively secure; there were few incidents. But the people had a mental fear of the Viet Cong -- an obsession. They felt the Viet Cong might always come back or could be anywhere at any time.

I set up the census grievance program because I wanted to release the people from their mental fear of the Viet Cong. The people did not have psychological confidence in our forces and the army and the PF. They always suspected that one or two people in these or any other government agencies might have secret connections with the Viet Cong and, therefore, were afraid to give any information to the government.

The census grievance program was begun in 1963.

The essential idea was that one cadre would be assigned by a province chief with a closed office in each village. Then on a regular basis this census grievance official would see all the people from the village for an equal length of time, usually about three

minutes and then he would walk out the door. So it became impossible to know who had said something to the official and who hadn't -- only the official knew.

The census grievance official would talk to the person and first begin to ask him about his family, how they were, who were his relations in the village, and what were the various members of his family doing. Secondly, he would begin to ask about whether the individual had any problems with government officials or with the soldiers, and whether he wanted anything done about these problems, or if he wanted more services, government aid of one kind or another. Thirdly, the official would ask the villager whether he had seen any suspicious activity lately, such as strangers near the village, change in the number of persons living in homes nearby, or movement of supplies or goods in the area.

Once the census grievance program had begun operating for a little while, the people in the hamlet began to be suspicious but this time in a reverse sense. They no longer merely worried about whether someone was an informer for the Viet Cong or whether they were Viet Cong agents who watched and knew what their activities were. Rather they now began to wonder whether and if some of

the people were informing to the government about them. No one knew whether anyone was giving any information; no one knew what kind of information might be given. But the whole procedure and the fact that nothing could be known about what went on began to have an effect on those people who were secretly members of what we called the "on-the-spot Viet Cong." Within one month after the program began operating, seven people voluntarily left the village. These were the Viet Cong agents in the village.

In 1964 this program was so successful in my province that almost every province installed this system toward the end of 1964.

Colonel Chau's procedures for dealing with the people's grievances

A problem with the census grievance program was that the established authorities of the village, the police chief and the hamlet chief, etc., of course began to worry also about whether the people were informing on their activities. For that reason they were not cooperative at first and quite suspicious of the program. A problem I faced then was, "if I created jealousy between the census grievance cadre and the village chief, I would

destroy the basis of the village chief's authority."

My procedure then for dealing with complaints and grievances against the village chief was the following: (1) the census grievance cadre would put this information to the district office; (2) the district office would pass the information on to my personal staff of inspectors who would then go out and verify the fact that the grievance cited actually was occurring; (3) the inspector would report to a special committee of the province chiefs and would recommend action; (4) finally, I myself would have a talk with the village chief, explain the information and attempt to persuade him to change his ways. My purpose "was not to punish but to educate the village chiefs and to change their behavior."

I also kept two afternoons open a week at the province capital where anyone could come and personally tell me about any problems he was having in the province. This audience with me was open to anyone, first come, first served. Another technique we used was to broadcast on a radio program we had a discussion of a problem that had occurred either in a named village or a village that was described in general. The problem would be described, then the way the case was solved, the solutions that were

proposed by the province chief or adopted by the village chief as the case may be. This broadcasting of real problems and real solutions, together with the afternoon audience possibilities brought many people to see me in my office, and gave many people hope that some things could be changed.

The way I handled these fears and suspicions of the other government officials was mainly to try to talk with them, listen to their problems, listen to the concerns they had about the census grievance program. I tried to make myself available to them and help them understand that as long as they performed properly, there was nothing they need worry about. In fact, with time, many police chiefs told me that they found me far from being a threat, a valuable province chief, because at least I was accessible to them and they could talk to me about the problems they were having.

Daniel Ellsberg's comments on the census grievance system

This entire discussion brings out a number of very interesting points. One is that information flow is felt to be very important by the Communists and Colonel Chau is one of those rare people in the GVN or American establishment who likewise is very concerned with promoting the accumulation of accurate information on the people whom government programs, pacification, military programs and the like are supposedly aimed at.

In Vietnam within the administrative agencies of the GVN there is generally a very high rate of personnel turnover, so there are very few people within the GVN who know anything about "their areas." As a result of the census grievance program in Kien Huo province, however, an enormous amount of very important data had been collected and could be passed on from one hamlet village or district or province official to the next. For example, in a very simple hamlet of the province -- a hamlet would consist of a number of houses with some coconut and banana trees and the like -- there would be a simple thatched hut like all the others on the outside which would contain the data collected by

the census grievance system. Inside this hut would be a very accurately, in fact, even artistically drawn map of the hamlet showing the property owned by each person, exactly where it was, its extent, and what was produced on that property. In addition, there would be file cards which clearly indicated the pattern of relations among people within the hamlet and among the various hamlets in the village. Further, there would be very complete listings of all relatives presumed working with the Viet Cong, or with the GVN administrative apparatus. In addition to that, the census grievance data cards also had breakdowns of age groups, the amount of education received by various people, land holdings, and other such socio-economic information. Colonel Chau has not mentioned this purely informational aspect of the census grievance program, but as it worked out, it provided Kien Hao province with one of the few incidences of worthwhile information on the people in a local area.

One organization in Vietnam is known for backing new ideas. It backed the census grievance program in Kien Hoa province as a pilot project. Once it began working so well, it was immediately tried on a nation-wide scale. There it could not work so well

for three main reasons: 1) not all province chiefs are anywhere near as good as Colonel Chau; 2) the cadre must be instructed to collect grievances and complaints about the government rather than merely to elicit information about the Viet Cong. The cadre cannot be motivated if they are to be nothing more than spies for the government; 3) there came to be an emphasis on the third part of the census grievance program -- the collection of information on the Viet Cong. As a result of this, the cadre were neither as motivated nor as effective as they had been in the initial program.

But the "effectiveness of Colonel Chau's census grievance program was not dependent on who was running it"; it did provide information. In fact, there never had been as much information as was obtained by this system. The system was by no means as good as it had been in its pilot province, but it still was effective for some purposes when extended to a national scale.

The reasons why Kien Hoa is not more secure today

Despite the success mentioned in 1964, it is correct to say that Kien Hoa province is not much more secure today than any other province in Vietnam. The reasons for this might be better understood if I describe my operations at the time a bit more.

I used the census grievance information as an input to several counterterrorist groups which I ran. These counterterrorist groups usually operated in small units of three men and were very effective in assassinating VC cadre in the area of my control. In addition to this I attempted to contact the families of persons who were working with the VC and used them as a means to bring people back to the government side.

The way I would do this was the following: once census grievance information gave us lists of people who were working with the VC, I would make a public announcement within each hamlet of the families which had a member working with the VC either in the village or elsewhere. When these families saw their names published in an open list like this, their feelings were hurt and they felt that their prestige in the

community had been lessened. The whole purpose of the public announcement was to cause them some psychological shock and prepare them for visits from selected Chieu Hoi cadre who then came in and spoke with the family. These Chieu Hoi tried to convince the family that they should make an effort to get their VC members back. Usually the families then tried to get the VC members back. They would either talk to them when the VC members visited them, or they would communicate by writing or in some other way. Whether the family was successful or not, the net effect of this was demoralizing for the Viet Cong members because they saw their families' loyalty disappear and felt themselves more alone in the movement.

Furthermore, the family's position and its unity before had been quite secure. They had a member working with the Viet Cong but no one really knew for sure, and they did not feel they had to hide anything. But with the publication of the list, the family began to feel insecure. That was the reason for their emotional shock -- that was the reason they felt sorry they had a VC member in the family. And once the family felt insecure like this, they didn't want the VC members to

come back as often, so the whole arrangement of membership in the Viet Cong became a much less comfortable affair for the Viet Cong member. He couldn't simply return to his family and be equally comfortable in the government side as well as the Viet Cong side of the Vietnamese scene.

Now to return to the reasons for the deterioration of the security of Kien Hoa province. First, the census grievance no longer worked after I left. Secondly, the counter-terrorist groups did not work because my successor decided to consolidate the small 3-man units, first into platoon and then even into company size. Thirdly, I had had support from eminent people in my province from the Catholics from the Hoa Hoa, from the Cao Dai, and so forth, but my successor could not obtain their support.

The reason for that is because I went around the province a lot by jeep and bicycle. I kept in constant touch with the villages and hamlets and with the officials, and I tried to be very sure to visit the hospital, both civil as well as military patients, and the prisons, at least once a week. My successor did not do this -- the

people made an unfavorable comparison and he did not receive their support as I have. "The failure of pacification is not due to military arrangements."

Six steps to pacification -- Chau's program^{*}

When I ask people, Vietnamese or American, what is the end object of pacification, the answer always is something like, winning the hearts and minds of the people so that they will support the government. To me this is no objective at all. It merely permits all commanders on all levels of government to do what they wish.

When I hear an objective like this, I say that there is no pacification program. It's too vague.

The objective of pacification should be people's self-defense. By this I mean that:

ideologically as well as militarily, people must be convinced that they cannot stand as neutrals. They must either go with the Communists or with the government.

I will never consider a hamlet as pacified as long as the people are willing to protect themselves. No place in Vietnam can be considered as pacified in this sense at the present. There are only secure places which are secure because of the presence of military forces.

Now what will make people willing to defend themselves? That will occur only when people are running their own affairs. And how can this be obtained? This

^{*}For comment: see pp. 46-48.

can be obtained when elections are really desired by the people, rather than merely imposed on them as it has happened so often in the past.

Local people's organizations

Elections will be desired by the people only when they have their roots in the understanding that government can do something for them. People's organizations exist in Vietnam as elsewhere in the world. "These organizations train people to respond to community spirit."

Farmers realize farmers belong to a farmers' association because it helps them with their crops. They then learn about representation and government when they realize that they can't devote their own time to running the farmers' organization, so they must appoint a representative to run the organization for them.

Improve living standard of people

To make local people's organizations really important, they must do something tangible for the people. What I mean by improving the living standard is an improvement in economic conditions and also an improvement in their dignity. The people are most concerned with things like justice, fairness, protection, and the like. The city and town people care the most about

dignity and justice. People in the country are most concerned with economic development and, in fact, wouldn't really understand any system that was supposed to guarantee them justice. They would see justice not in any set of procedures but merely in the way things are run.

This is where AID programs should come in -- they should be brought in at this level -- at the village hamlet level -- to improve the economic conditions of the people.

Why have so many AID programs failed to work? Because most of the people working were technicians and they were only technicians -- they did not use economic aid for political purposes in the villages and hamlets. Also, they did not really understand the local political situation and so often were taken in by the people who used economic aid for their self-interest.

Investigation into local natural leaders

For that reason it is important to know who are the most influential people in the community, that is, who are the people who can really have an impact on the people and get them to use new economic and agricultural techniques. For the most part, AID technicians don't

know this and neither do Vietnamese. This must be found out by doing a thorough investigation of this before putting in economic aid.

Confidence of the people

By confidence of the people I mean two things: first, security from the Viet Cong and, secondly, proper behavior of the GVN. These things are necessary before anything can be done in the community.

Now in Vietnam all of these six things have been done, but they have never been done together in one place at one time and they haven't been done in the proper sequence. The sequence of events is all-important if the end result is to be the people's self-defense as I have outlined it. The sequence must be as follows:

- 1) confidence; 2) investigation of leaders; 3) improvement of living standards; 4) local people's organizations; 5) local elections; and 6) people's self-defense.

Pacification

You have asked me to talk about the good and bad aspects of pacification in 1966 and 1967. The good aspects were the following two: first, there was a definite pacification program; secondly, we made

strenuous efforts to implement the pacification program, and finally, we made some efforts to evaluate its success and failures. It was only toward the end of 1966 that we in the Ministry of Rural Development were able to convince the Vietnamese military of the need for pacification.

Question: What lessons did you learn about pacification in 1966?

The most important failure was "the improper selection of areas to be pacified." Our failure was that we tried to make too rapid progress and we neglected the district towns and other areas that were marked as secure. The point was that only in a few pacified areas that had been considered insecure before 1966 could district and local officials show any real progress in pacification. So we neglected the central towns and district capitals, etc., and other such secure areas, and concentrated our pacification efforts on the areas just outside the secure areas.

The bureaucratic process of selecting areas to be pacified^{*}

In theory, suggestions of areas to be pacified was by the suggestion of the district chief, but in fact the province chief told the district chiefs which hamlets to select. And the

^{*}Comment: see p. 49.

province chief was told by the corp commander or division commander which area to pacify and his main purpose was to extend the secure areas.

But this description of the actual process by which areas were selected is not quite accurate.

In practice pacifications areas were selected sometimes by the district chief, sometimes by the province chief, and sometimes by the divisional corp commander.

Impact of bureaucratic, economic and other interests on the selection of areas to be pacified

Actually the selection of areas to be pacified did not depend so much on the matter of tangible interests, but rather was more related to the "concept the various people had of pacification."

The province chief usually selected areas on a political basis. I selected my areas on the basis of these factors: (1) Whether there was enough security. This is the most important factor -- security enough for the pacification teams to work. (2) The manpower factor, meaning the number of people living there. I used this as a guideline to how important the area was. (3) The existence of notable people who could mobilize people to participate in pacification programs. (4) My estimate of the sympathy of people in the area to be pacified and if it would be possible to win them over.

Many Vietnamese government institutions talk about the criteria of selection for pacification but say nothing about the final objectives for pacification.

It is impossible to select areas or to establish criteria for selection without a clear idea of the real objectives for pacification.

The ABC area concept

Consider three concentric rectangles with the inside one the first one, the A area; the second one the B area, and the third one the C area. Assume that the A area marks the immediate location of hamlets and villages around a major district or province town. According to my ideas, the A area is the place where one should begin working on pacification, that is, it is secure enough for the pacification forces to work in, and now with additional effort, one tries to get the people to organize their own self-defense -- the end objective of pacification as I have mentioned earlier.

Under those circumstances one deploys pacification personnel in the A area; the B area we will call the contested area, and in that, military deployment is needed to keep the Viet Cong out of the A area. And, in the C area we'll call that the Viet Cong-controlled, the Viet Cong may have large forces, bases, and hideouts.

(Comment by Ellsberg: The current situation is that people in A areas haven't taken sides, and an area

is secure only when it is saturated with troops. The people in these "secure" areas are passive; they don't cooperate with the government in their defense; they haven't been forced to take sides in the manner that Chau envisions. A major reason the government doesn't want to work in the A areas is because this will not permit statistical display of progress since the areas are already called "secure.")

My overall strategy is to move out from a number of relatively secure areas within a province, deploying pacification cadre first in the A areas, then to the B areas, and so forth, hoping to link up several foci so that the net area that might be called truly pacified grows and becomes connected together.

The strategy called for spreading out from many centers of security. It is not possible to begin with one area and then continually enlarge the sphere of security because that would mean in effect abandoning many districts and province towns that are now relatively secure. If people are abandoned who already have, in effect, sided with the government, the effect may be disastrous. To do that and concentrate all efforts in one area and then spread out would be giving up much too

much. The Viet Cong would take over all the areas that had been left, of course.

(Comment by Pauker: Whether a single center or many overall strategies are adopted probably depends on popular attitudes. If areas are secure only because there are lots of troops there, but the people really haven't made any commitment of any kind to the government or might even be leaning toward the VC, then theoretically not much is lost by withdrawing to a single area and concentrating resources in order to begin spreading out from there. If, on the other hand, people in the other centers of pacification activity, have in a sense come to depend on the government or trust it, or what not, then withdrawing could be catastrophic.)

<u>Area</u>	<u>Current Deployment</u>	<u>Chau's Preferred Deployment</u>
A	ARVN base	A popular self-defense force plus (presumably) RD cadre.
B	Some ARVN Some U.S. troops Some PF	A uniform police force -- field police which had absorbed the RF and PF, and the urban police force.
C	None -- or popular force; regional force	ARVN operations in the "C" area.

In effect, my concept of military operations reverses the current situation. Right now the popular forces in the C area in effect protect ARVN which huddles in the district and province towns of the A area. I would make the deployment as indicated (see page 25) and give political control of the A and B areas to the province chief, while leaving ARVN in control of the C area. The C area, then, would be the primary field of ARVN operations with the uniform police handling police and security functions in the A and B areas.

(Comment by Menges: Has Chau or anyone else made any preliminary estimates of the extent to which the ABC area concept in reality reflects the security situation in South Vietnam? Might it not be that there are corridors or patches of B and C areas within a larger A area, or vice versa? Or, put another way, I might ask whether the A, B, and C areas are mere constructs or whether they are meant to reflect geographically contiguous regions. Does geography here really matter? Partially I'll answer my own question by saying that since force deployment and political authority is involved, territorial units are basic to Chau's scheme. The notion of ARVN operating in a C area which crosses

through A or B areas or of having uniform police operate in a defined A area while one-half mile away the C area is left to ARVN, and so forth, seems completely absurd. In other words, since the concept does depend in broad measure on the security situation in South Vietnam, being divisible into more or less contiguous if not necessarily concentric A-, B-, or C-type areas, the first question that needs to be answered is whether this, in fact, is the case in South Vietnam. It also seems logical to ask whether Chau or anyone else has tried any variant of this scheme.)

Organization of youth as a strategy

Question: Might it not now be time and in fact essential to begin the organization of semi-totalitarian youth groups similar to the young communists or Hitler Youth as a way of building an anti-Communist cadre?

It is not possible in Vietnam to extract one group from the society and deal with it alone as was done in Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union or in Communist Cuba. Programs of this type have failed in the past because the indoctrination did not include the parents, relatives and other elements of the society that are essential since the youth will not simply follow an organization

alone. Also, in order to have indoctrination it is necessary to have a doctrine.

Question: But for the very young children, eight, nine, and ten years old, the doctrine can be relatively simple anti-communist, and youth and sport associations can be the means by which subtly a gradual measure of indoctrination occurs.

Well, the French tried to do exactly this in the mid-1940s. They formed many sport organizations and the like in order to get youth to use up energy and not think about nationalism and other such ideas. But in fact it had precisely the reverse effect; I was in the Boy Scouts as I mentioned before and other youth and sport associations, but when we went out to the countryside bicycling and other such things, we enjoyed it but this did not leave us satisfied. We, in a sense, became more energetic because of these organizations, became more disciplined, more concerned about the society and, in fact, ultimately we became more nationalistic.

In Vietnam many youth organizations have been tried since 1954. Many were formed and many have been disbanded. Diem's approach was the Republican youth and this ended in 1963. As I mentioned, Vietnamese will

join if they are told to join something, but that isn't the same thing as being truly committed*.

Comments on ARVN

Responding to the question of the quality of the officer corps of ARVN, I would make the following breakdown: NCOs, 90 percent are good; company commanders, that is, lieutenants and second lieutenants about 80 percent; captains, 70 percent good; majors, about 60 to 50 percent; then colonels and generals from 20 to 15 percent good. In other words, the higher the rank, the lower the political morale and military quality of the persons who hold them.

Reasons for the GVN's neglect of the people

The major reason the people are neglected by the GVN is what I shall call facilities and resources aspect of the situation. On the government's side all facilities and resources come from the state -- they come from outside the people, it seems, while on the VC side, it is necessary to get all these facilities and resources directly from the people, so they are not able to ignore the people.

This is a fundamental difference -- one side is directly and clearly tied to the people. It understands

*Comment: see pp. 50-53.

this -- the Communists know that unless they are able to extract and coerce and voluntarily get resources from people, they will have nothing. On the government side, though, it seems that the people's cooperation is not directly necessary for anything.

The Vietminh did not steal from the people, not because of communist ideology and other high-blown reasons, but due to "practical necessity." They knew that they would have to get supplies from the people tomorrow, so, if they were to steal one time, they understood that the people would immediately begin to hide all the supplies from them, and they would not have a second, third, or fourth opportunity to steal from the people. The Vietminh knew this even though they might have been willing to use force. If they stole or were too rough with the people, they would simply not be able to find the supplies they needed. They wouldn't even be able to buy the supplies they needed.*

Main problems at the top echelons of the South Vietnamese government

After the fall of Diem in 1963, there were in reality three powers in South Vietnam: ARVN, United

* See p. 57 for comment.

States, and the Viet Cong.

That means for the South Vietnamese government there were in effect two powers, and the dramatic situation is that no one seems to be the real leader. Americans expect initiative and performance from the Vietnamese; they wait for the Vietnamese to act. At the same time the Vietnamese expect ideas, initiative, and leadership from the United States.

Many of the natural leaders in South Vietnam expected various things from the United States while the U.S. people did not want to take over the real leadership for obvious reasons. As the situation now is, no one acts as a leader.

The Americans interfere but not enough to get anything really done; and the Vietnamese initiate but they don't follow through in doing anything.

Question: Perhaps you could take the 1966 pacification program and give us a case study description of the way these problems work at the top.

The situation in the rural development ministry was the following: General Thang was in charge of the program. Colonel Lok was his deputy and he was in charge of what I would call "routine" operations, that is, getting the supplies there on time, taking care of running the day-to-day things. Colonel Quang had to handle the budget; his role was to decide how much went into each of the

various programs, and I was in charge of the rural operations and the rural development cadre program. In effect it meant that there were two people who had a planning role; these were myself and General Thang.

Question: For example, how did the Ministry of Rural Development go about getting budget support -- what bureaucratic allies did it have; who were the opponents of the Rural Development Ministry?

Here the United States' role was very important. The Americans felt that this was a very good idea and they were willing to give almost the complete budget of 3 billion piasters.*

Question: What is wrong with ARVN leadership in your opinion?

First, there is too much difference in the treatment among different ranks from General to Colonel to Major and down in the officer corps. The salaries are not too different, but the Generals and Colonels have government houses, cars, drivers, and all sorts of special funds.

* Comment by Menges: Despite various efforts, it was difficult to get Colonel Chau to talk about elite politics even within the tangible context of the pacification program. Another effort was made later by Ellsberg in the discussion, and this did not meet with greater success in getting Colonel Chau to trace out the full play of elite politics.

Captains, Lieutenants, Majors don't have government housing, don't have cars, and the like. Secondly, the promotion system is not terribly fair.

We have a Board of Promotion and everything, but despite that every General has to deal with other Generals to survive, so promotions are actually handled in the following way -- if you want your men to be promoted, you have to promote those the other Generals suggest.

So when the promotion list comes around, tradition is that two-thirds of those suggested by each General actually get promoted. And all the Generals cooperate with each other on this. "So officers realize that they have to make a choice to stay with one General or another." If his career goes up, they go up; if he goes down, they go down.

This was the situation until 1965, but since then the system has gotten better. Promotion, in other words, has been mainly based on political concerns, not ability. Every officer realizes that he must have "an influential affiliation" if he is going to get ahead.*

* Comment by Menges: There was no chance to ask Chau how/why the system had gotten better in the last two years. This might be worth exploring. For a comment on reforming military promotion systems, see pp. 54-56.

Comments on GVN elite politics

Question: As a case study of the political process in South Vietnam, could you describe to us how one might attempt to go about changing the promotion system at the upper levels of ARVN? What might the role of the National Assembly be of the United States, etc?

The Americans didn't like Diem so they withdrew support from him and gave it to Khanh and then to one general after another. It seems that the Americans keep looking for people. They try to impose leaders who fit their conception of leadership. Sometimes one feels that the Americans look on Vietnam as a very primitive country and they think that if they impose a suitable leader, all would be well.

There are three choices for Vietnam: a communist system, a mixed democracy-dictatorial system, or a real democratic system. We have already tried choices one and two. The communist system has failed in the North and it would have the same bad effects in the South. The mixed system under Diem was clearly unsuccessful, therefore, it is now time that we tried a genuine democratic system.

In South Vietnam at the present time neither the government nor the legislature is all-powerful. There is some sort of balance held by the United States. The legislature represents the sympathy of the people but cannot in any way mobilize

their active support. While the government represents the desperate choice of the people but does not have their active support in any sense.

So the United States has to support the democratic system in Vietnam. It has to make clear to the generals and to the government of South Vietnam that it will support the principle and practice of the current constitution of South Vietnam. Right now there is some degree of danger in being a member of the legislature as I am and attempting to bring about reforms and changes in the central government. You will recall the assassination of one leading figure in the constituent assembly. I will continue to try but I won't try too hard because I realize that if arrested I'm not doing anybody any good, least of all myself. For me it is very important that I know that the United States will defend, not me personally, but the principle of legislative government if anything should happen to me. There are other people like me who are more likely to be willing to take chances in attempting to reform the system if they believe that the United States government will support the constitutional system.*

* Comment from Menges: There was then an approximately one hour discussion on the military aspects of local operations. This is not recorded here.

Reformist elements in ARVN

The captains and the majors are most important and reformist oriented. There are two types of captains and majors. There are the youth who have just become captains and majors, and then there is another large group of officers who had been passed over at promotion several times.

Main changes desired in the GVN

One, a better balance between executive and legislature. Two, the encouragement of a loyal opposition. Three, integration of Buddhists with the government. Since their defeat in 1966, the GVN has done nothing to win over Buddhist leadership and bring about greater cooperation with the organized Buddhist community.

This is an important element that is not at all understood by the current South Vietnamese leadership. Although one of the Buddhist leaders such as Tri Quang may have only 5 percent of his followers who would really obey his orders and become active politically at his distinct request, the other 95 percent would, if Tri Quang were persecuted, immediately move against the government. They would withdraw all support and collaboration with

the government; that is, though they probably would fight ^{not} against it, the government would have lost their support. This is what the government does not understand, that by failing to make efforts at symbolic unity with more of the factions and groups in South Vietnam, it is losing any chance of bringing the various followers of the movements and people and groups into any kind of active collaboration with it. This doesn't mean, of course, that these same people would collaborate with the Viet Cong. But in any case they are lost to the government.

Question: Why is there no effort to organize these other political elements in South Vietnam by the generals?

Two reasons: first, the government people feel that these various opposition leaders have no real following. They think there's no reason to take the trouble to win them over politically because they can neither help them nor hurt them. Secondly, it is a matter of interest.

It is not possible to bring people in unless you give them something. I am not even speaking of economic interests in this case. If the generals want to bring leaders of other groups into Vietnamese politics, they have to share power and authority. They are afraid to share any power.

Question: Could you, without naming specific names, describe some of the elements of the circles of the power that surround the generals you mentioned?

These might be of many kinds, for example, there might be a general who has five province chiefs who are essentially his. Another general might have three ministries.

General Thang's resignation

Question: Could you tell us something about some of the obstacles to the reform program that General Thang attempted and the reason he resigned?

A very complex story with many sides. The generals could probably accept the reform plan of General Thang, but they did not want to accept it from him. The reason for this is that they believed that this whole reform scheme was essentially an American plan and that they gave it to General Thang. The South Vietnamese generals believed this was an American plan to let General Thang be successful as a reformer in order to have him take over as the Premier in South Vietnam. In other words, the Americans were getting ready to switch leaders again and for that reason the current group wanted to make

sure that General Thang would not be successful. But I think that the reform plan will be adopted by the generals.*

* Comment by Menges: Chau was very reluctant to go into this in any greater detail on this day. Nor did he the next day when I tried to get him to speak further on these topics. .Partly I believe this is a matter of ignorance on exactly how the generals operate. Partly it seems to be a matter of discretion, or desire to limit the information he gives us. Ellsberg would have a better sense of which it might be. Chau had mentioned earlier that there is a classmate circle of people who had graduated from the same military academy at the same time; these include Ky, Loan, and about four others. All graduated from Nahm Binh Academy in the early 1950s.

PART II. FIRST-REACTION COMMENTS AND IDEAS

While listening to Colonel Chau's presentations, I quickly jotted down a number of ideas and questions. In dictating the preceding remarks, I also reconstructed my reactions and decided to include some of them here in the event they might be of wider interest. Those who wish to read only the kinds of prose and ideas that have been finely polished by flows of time and careful effort should not read this.

Comment: Bureaucratic system or leadership personality --
weighing their relative importance*

Two interrelated aspects of the census grievance discussion raised interesting questions for policy and analysis. The first concerns the relationship between the production of useful intelligence about the Viet Cong through the system, and the collection of information about grievances against the GVN and subsequent action, if any, to deal with these. At the beginning of his discussion, Colonel Chau seemed to suggest that the very act of providing for a ritual and private discussion with

* This relates to the above discussion of the Census Grievance System, see pp. 8-14.

a government official was enough to create suspicion among the villagers that some were informing about Viet Cong activities. He said nothing about the fact that the villager's discussions of grievances had anything to do with the disruption of the Viet Cong within the village that resulted from the system of equal-length private conversations with all persons. This question needs to be discussed a bit further. Was there, in fact, a correlation between the amount of intelligence received through the census grievance procedure and the number of grievances that people expressed? Or, was there any correlation between the government action to correct the grievances and the amount of intelligence received through the census grievance procedure?

The key element of the relationship between grievances and intelligence about the Viet Cong suggested by Ellsberg concerned the personal disposition of the census grievance cadre. But still nothing was said about any action to correct the grievances described by the villagers as relating at all to the success of the operation in either deterring participation in the Viet Cong or causing on-the-spot agents to become discomfited and leave.

But the more interesting question that came out of this part of Colonel Chau's presentation was whether a particular procedure would work equally well or could be designed to work equally well irrespective of the personal quality of the province chief or government official who had charge of its implementation. The general impression among many of us listening to Colonel Chau was that his program was successful only because he was running it, because he had the energy, the dynamism and, above all, the value system that made him desire that the program be effective and work hard toward that end. Perhaps my particular orientation in political analysis leads me to think more strongly of conflicting interests and bargaining as being the motive forces of political action, whereas in fact Colonel Chau's presentation suggests that much more personal elements such as friendliness, sympathy, empathy, persuasion, and the like, can be used to win over potentially antagonistic elements of what might otherwise be competing or sabotaging bureaucracies. In this again the personality of the province chief implementing the census grievance program was critical.

Yet Ellsberg argued that the system was effective irrespective of who was administering it, by which, as a subsequent remark immediately indicated he meant it was effective in some measure. Obviously, the better the man the better the system would work in all.

This particular example suggests that a key intellectual and policy problem in Vietnam, and, in fact, in most political environments, would be to design programs that would be effective within a certain broad range of personal quality of administrators -- in fact, that is precisely what bureaucratic organizations are all about. They are supposed to function because of the combined momentum of procedure, tradition, and clear-cut division of labor. We might for this census grievance program try to list certain sets of personnel conditions and relate these to expected effectiveness of the program as follows:

CONDITIONS

EXPECTED EFFECTIVENESS

Minimal -- province chief not active VC sympathizer; province chief attempts to make program work by paying at least the minimum amount of attention to the entire task; province chief attempts to recruit more or less competent personnel to make the census grievance investigation.

Would expect that this would at least cause some dismay among the VC infrastructure and, at best, provide a good intelligence about VC operations in a hamlet or village.

Optimum -- in addition to the above, province chief is enthusiastic, dynamic, constantly active, persuasive with local leaders, government officials -- e.i., a Colonel Chau type.

In addition to the above, would expect census grievance program to lead to gradual improvement of GVN government operations through the persuasive correction of GVN official abuses; would expect program to lead to gradual building of loyalty to GVN because of correction of abuses, because of sense of direct participation by the people, etc.

The point of this kind of exercise is to suggest that the critical variables are neither a bureaucratic system nor a personality; that reality is generally not dichotomous like this, but continuous. Programs in actual life usually neither work out exactly as planned nor fail completely; things happen somewhere inbetween. What analysts and policy planners can and should do more often is think about the relationships between the range

of qualities of possible administrators of a program and the range of outcomes that these quality differences may lead to. If this could be done systematically, it might be possible to avoid either designing programs that require a superior calibre personnel for even a moderate success and/or it might be possible to avoid setting unattainable and unrealistic goals which, when not met, only result in demoralization, especially of idealistic American types.

Comment: Colonel Chau's six-fold path to success^{*}

This six-fold path may be fine as a general scheme for training courses of revolutionary cadre and the like. But clearly for the most part it is what we all know to be the best possible solution for making the best possible world in Vietnam; in fact, most of these same points could be applied to a good many parts of the United States, perhaps with less success than Vietnam. One always wonders whether it is worth discussing such a grand program seriously because, after all, its general outline can't be disagreed with but its implementation in part or whole may be impossible if "the structure" is kept intact, especially with the deterministic tone that unless things are done in precisely this sequence, nothing can change for the better. But if one were going to discuss it as the outline of an action program, there are at least two levels of possibly fruitful idea-mongering. First, would be some questions about the whole sequence -- whether there really is some kind of inevitable pattern that must be followed and whether the various parts are in fact separable either in time or in programmatic

^{*} This refers to pp. 17-20 of Chau's discussions.

application. The simplest illustration would be to take step 1 -- confidence. Confidence is presumed to rest upon "only two things," security and the proper behavior of the GVN. This is the first step before all the other things happen. What, in turn, is necessary for the physical security of the people? Of course there must be troops nearby, there must be the instruments of defense against the Viet Cong, but that's not enough because the primary element in security, especially from the kind of lightning raids that have a demoralizing effect, is prior warning of Viet Cong presence or Viet Cong intention to attack. But if this warning comes in, that essentially amounts to step 6 -- people's self-defense. They are defending themselves by collaborating with the government -- something that's hard to do in an environment where there is no confidence in the government, that is where security has not yet been established.

And so only one of the it seems innumerable chicken-egg aspects of this whole scheme is traced, but let's move to the other part of the first step, the proper behavior of the GVN. Why should the GVN behave properly in initial stages if the people in the area where GVN officials operate have no power, as we presume they don't?

Among other things, proper behavior of the GVN will be assured at the end of step 6 because the people will have some kind of local power and presumably that means access to higher levels of authority over the particular levels that are misbehaving. But again until step 6 has been reached, it seems, there is little chance of obtaining one of the pre-requisites for the success of step 1. This comment is meant not as a logician's play with a serious matter. Rather, it is an illustration of the way in which even serious and respectable program suggestions can unwittingly rest upon internally contradictory assumptions and analysis.

Comment: Developing criteria for the assignment of
pacification personnel^{*}

This part of the discussion raised interesting aspects of the United States pacification policy which the RAND group to my knowledge so far has not addressed. We have not really asked the question of how one might wish to distribute the scarce resources of pacification personnel and material components of the program. Is it really possible to define areas that are "most important" or more important than others? Have efforts been made to do so by U.S. personnel? by Vietnamese personnel? And how does one measure the potential feasibility of pacification in advance of making the effort? Here the experience of Chau and his colleagues in 1966 and 1967 seems directly relevant.

^{*} See pp. 21-23 of Chau's discussion.

Comment: Popular perceptions of democracy and participation *

After several more comments on this general topic,
Chau went on to say:

The people in Saigon have not understood the
aspirations of the people.

This led into a general discussion of democracy and broad political strategy which became quite heated in parts, with the RAND people mostly participating. Part of it was initiated by Michael Arnsberg's question, "Do people in the countryside know what democracy is? They don't have a word for it in Vietnamese." Chau replied that whether they had a word for it or not wasn't that important, that people were at times attracted to the Viet Cong because the Viet Cong involved them in a participation process. It consulted them, in theory, on their preferences for different kinds of policies, and there were many levels which went from the hamlet to higher levels of the Viet Cong organization. Whereas the Saigon government never seemed to consult the people at all.

I then came in with two main comments: first, that although democracy might be very difficult and subtle as a philosophical concept, when looked at from the simple

* Refers to pp. 27-29 of Chau's discussion.

matter of how different kinds of governments perform, people understand what democracy is and they can differentiate quite clearly among regimes. The natural intelligence of people -- all people who have moved from a completely traditional social context at least, permits them to understand when a government or regime merely forces them to do something, or is actually responsive to their real interests in a material and psychological sense, and most people generally begin to hate coercive regimes and approve of regimes that do not coerce them.

Secondly, the participation that the Viet Cong permit may at first seem to the people to be better than the GVN's pattern of operations because they think they are being consulted, and so forth. But after a time, and how long a time isn't quite certain, it may be three months, six months or several years, the people begin to understand that their participation in any important matters at least is no more than pseudo participation. They are going through the motions of giving advice to the regime, but in fact, the decisions, meaning tax rates, drafting of conscripts, freedom of movement and the like, that are made by the Viet Cong regime are not all dependent on these consultations with the people.

Arguing from the experience of persons living under communist regimes in the European countries, it seems that most people, again using their natural intelligence, are quite sophisticated and are easily able to distinguish between the ritual form of participation and the actual fact of a regime which is responsive to their demands. Therefore, the advantage of the Viet Cong that Chau cites may be only a temporary one because of this popular awareness that increases with time.

However, though I would argue that the natural intelligence of people first permits them to understand more or less what a democratic and responsive government is, and secondly, that they quickly begin to understand when their participation is only a ritual rather than influential aspect of the Viet Cong decisionmaking process, people may still prefer the Viet Cong to the GVN for a short time period because the GVN appears to neglect them altogether. In other words the basic logical fallacy so often occurring in different parts of the Vietnam debate is that dislike for one side may mean support for the other. I would argue that this is not the case. People may on the one hand not like the GVN because it seems far away and doesn't consult them without at all moving

their active support or loyalty to the Viet Cong. Or, people might quite soon begin to discern that their participation in the Viet Cong system is merely a ritual, a great charade, but still prefer the Viet Cong to the GVN -- at least for a time.

Comment: The "reform" of ARVN's promotion system *

The whole question of the promotion system as Chau describes it raises some of the knottiest questions of political analysis. In any large bureaucratic structure whether it be the Communist Party of the Soviet Union or a private corporation, or "even" the American military services, such research as there is indicates that promotion and advancement to higher levels usually occurs on the basis of informal affiliation with successful persons.

Janowitz's study of the American military clearly showed that it was the officers who had served on the personal staffs of officers who in turn were selected to the upper levels of the army, navy and air force that were brought up by the men under whom they had worked. This is the standard pattern in most large business corporations also. Granick's studies on the Soviet Union as well as those of Fainsod and Armstrong, indicate that the same career pattern mobility, that is, a personal staff tied to a leader who is rising with him, also occurred in the Soviet Union. The question, then, is how to define the limits of such a system in order to separate out the harmful from the harmless aspects of "influential affiliation" promotion.

* Refers to pp. 32-34 and 36-38 of Chau's discussion.

At most times, it seems, this pattern of influential affiliation is merely a natural and, in some respects, necessary concomitant of successful bureaucratic performance. Why might this be? Because, after all, any man in a leadership position must have as his key subordinates, men whom he knows and trusts. As it turns out, these are usually people whom he has known on his way up and whose ability he thinks highly of. Possibly the key axis of discrimination between functional and harmful clique patterns is related to the way in which an upwardly mobile person selects his clique. Presumably in the Soviet Communist Party, The RAND Corporation, and the military services, upwardly mobile leaders pull up along with them those individuals who have manifested ability to perform their particular tasks exceedingly well. That is, the ties aren't purely those of affect (friendship) much less those of relationship for financial kickback. Nevertheless, affect, cronyship and the like all play an important part even in the most "rational" bureaucracies.

This discussion may seem quite theoretical, yet it relates directly to the question of reforming the South Vietnamese army's promotion system. What criteria do we

wish to establish? And what evidence would we look for in order to see whether promotions are based on what we might now label as "acceptable influential affiliation" rather than destructive influential affiliations?

Comment on the discussion of: "Reasons for GVN neglect
of people"*

It seems that there are two, not just one, critical elements in the phenomenon that Chau is referring to. First, the resource dependence forces one side to treat the people with at least some minimal regularity and system and some minimal fairness. But that isn't enough -- the second element is that in the beginning of the insurrection the insurgents are much weaker than the opposing forces. So it is the combination of resource dependency and comparative weakness that makes them extremely vulnerable to the people's ill-will, if they were to antagonize large masses of the people for no good reason or without any resultant military or psychological benefits. Once the insurgents begin to control an area, and begin to get stronger than the opposing force, they can afford to be much more callous toward the people because their coercive instruments enable them both to extract more resources, that is, raise the cost to people trying to hide material from them, and secondly, they can make it very dangerous for the people to try to inform the government forces on them.

* See pp. 29-30 of Chau's discussion.

Chau's very original insight also brings up one more among the many paradoxes of Vietnam. In this case the paradox is that more and better material facilities for government has an effect directly opposite to the intended one. Much of the Vietnamese government's independence of the people is a direct consequence of the large-scale American economic assistance (and I separate this totally from the military assistance aspect). The purpose was to give the Vietnamese government free resources so that it need only provide administrative apparatus to distribute these to the people as a way of promoting loyalty. Paradoxically Chau is correct; the effect is quite the contrary.

The policy implication of this paradox is, however, less clear than one might think. The immediate conclusion would be to keep governments "lean," keep them honest, keep them effective by making sure that they remain dependent for their main resources on extractions from their own society. In fact, from 1964 to 1966, a great deal of American effort on the economic policy side went into attempts to persuade the Vietnamese government to reform the tax system and especially to increase the real tax burden of the most wealthy groups

in South Vietnam. Yet while that policy was being pursued -- mainly for accounting rather than subtle political reasons -- a danger that was continually talked about in the American cables was that by having the Vietnamese government extract more from the people, this would increasingly alienate them from the government. People in this case meaning not only the wealthy elites but also the middle classes and the masses. So any policymaker who was going to use this paradox as a guide to policy would immediately have to weigh the relative benefits and dangers of providing free resources and thereby letting the government float above and beyond people having little contact with them, versus a government which, dependent on the people for its resources, therefore would have to extract it with the consequent dangers of alienation, opposition, and protest.

The entire line of thinking does, however, raise an interesting thought. Might it be possible to design ways of building "concern for the people" into government organization by making the success of various bureaucracies in some way directly proportional to their capacity to elicit resources or support of one kind or another from the people. In an environment where large, well-organized

insurgent groups may work against any popular collaboration or support with the government agency, this may not be a relevant issue. But for many other contexts, including the American one, the question raises intriguing possibilities for institutional innovation.